

THE
DEFENDERS

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

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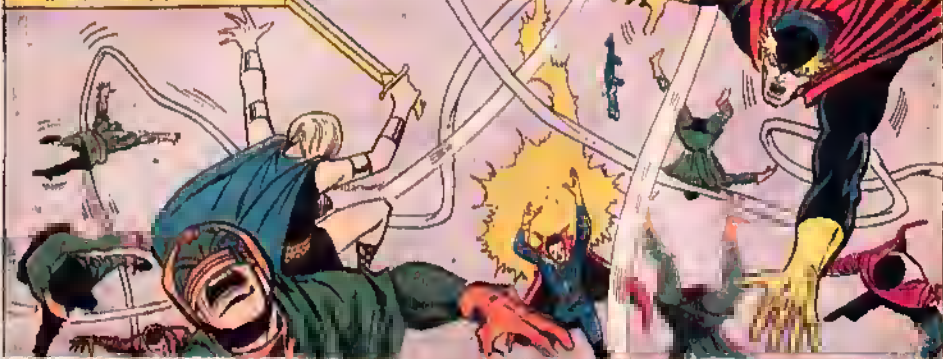
THE DEFENDERS™

THE VALKYRIE STANDS ALONE--AS SEARING DEATH REACHES
FOR THE DEFENDERS WITH COILS OF ELECTRIFIED FLURY!



...AND THE SNAKES
SHALL INHERIT
THE EARTH!

FORTUNATELY, BEFORE MORE LIVES COULD BE LOST... THE ONLY COOLER HEAD PRESENT PREVAILED, THAT OF DR. STRANGE, MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!

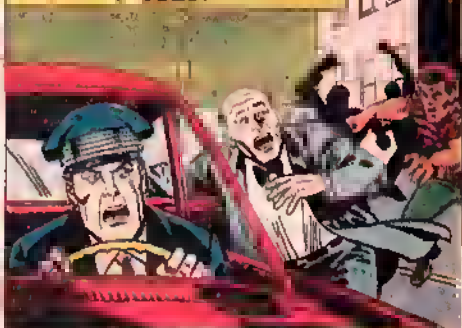


ANIMATING THE HEAVY FIRE NOSES, SENDING THEM SNAKING THRU THE MOB, THE SORCERER SUPREME DOWNED FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE...

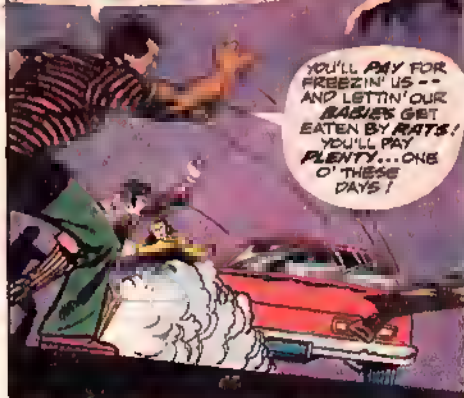
...FORCING THE SERPENT-SPAWN TO RETREAT, VOWING VENGEANCE...



...AND, WITH THE MILDEST TINGE OF REGRET, ALLOWING SLIMLORD HAROLD HOLLIMAN TO ESCAPE TO HIS WAITING LAUNDRYING BARELY IN TIME FOR THE LESSOR TO AVOID BEING TORN TO BITS BY HIS IRATE LESS-SES.



G'WAN -- RHY BACK TA YER LONG ISLAND LITTER BOX, YA STINKIN' FAT CAT! SEE IF WE CARE!



YOU'LL PAY FOR FREEZIN' US -- AND LETTIN' OUR BABIES GET EATEN BY RATS! YOU'LL PAY PLENTY... ONE O' THESE DAYS!

DID I MENTION, DOC... THAT I MET HOLLIMAN EARLIER TONIGHT -- AT A PARTY UPTOWN? HE WANTED TO TALK REAL ESTATE WITH KYLE RICHMOND. *I WASN'T IN THE MOOD.



PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE LISTENED MORE CLOSELY NIGHTHAWK. THE FORCES OF KARMA WORK IN PUZZLING WAYS.

*NIGHTHAWK'S ALTER EGO... LEN.

"IN ANY EVENT," SAYS THE MASTER MAGE TO HIS FELLOW DEFENDERS, "THERE IS LITTLE MORE WE MAY ACCOMPLISH HERE. I SUGGEST WE ADJOURN TO MY SANCTUM AND CONSIDER MEANS FOR DEALING WITH THE SERPENT SHOULD THEY RETURN, LEST..."

...the **SNAKES SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH!**

AND SO, VALKYRIE, NIGHTHAWK, STRANGE, AND THE HULK DEPART FOR THE MAGICIAN'S GREENWICH VILLAGE ABODE...

...UNWARE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED NOT ONLY BY A DEADLY DUO OF REPTILIAN-GARBED FOES...

...BUT ALSO BY THE MAN CALLED **YELLOW-JACKET!!**

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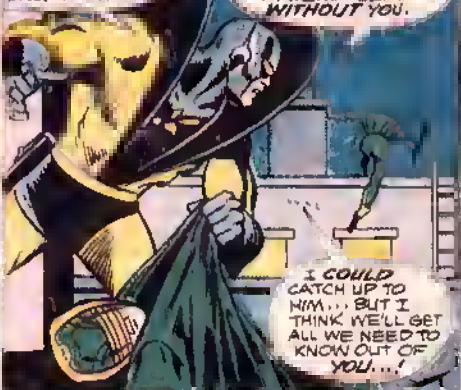
"RIGHT FOR THE GUT THIS TIME!" HE MUTTERS...
AND HIS FIST LUNGES HARD INTO THE SERPENT'S
SCAR FLEXUS.



Y.J. CAN FEEL
THE WIND
COME RUSHING
FROM HIS
FOE'S GAP-
ING JAWS...

...A
VERITABLE
SUMMER
BREEZE
ON THIS
CHILL WINTER
NIGHT.

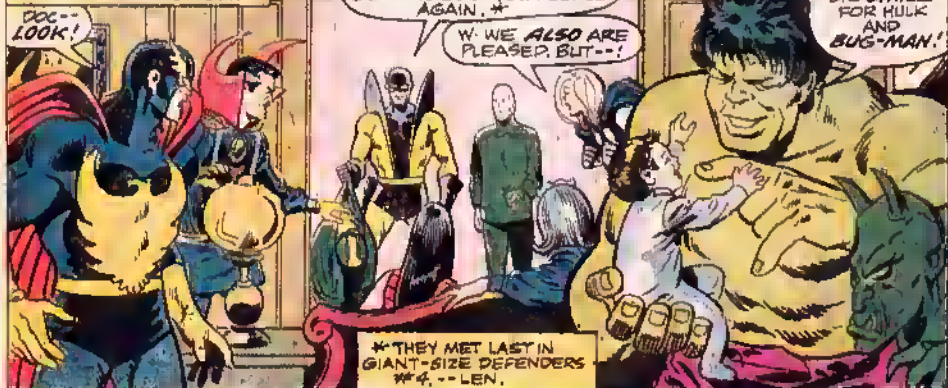
THAT'S IT-- JUST
LIE THERE AND
CATCH YOUR
BREATH WHILE.



ON SECOND THOUGHT,
DISREGARD THOSE
INSTRUCTIONS. YOUR
FRIEND LEFT
WITHOUT YOU.

I COULD
CATCH UP TO
HIM... BUT I
THINK WE'LL GET
ALL WE NEED TO
KNOW OUT OF
YOU...!

AND SO, MOMENTS LATER,
THE DEFENDERS RECEIVE
TWO SURPRISE VISITORS.



DOC--
LOOK!

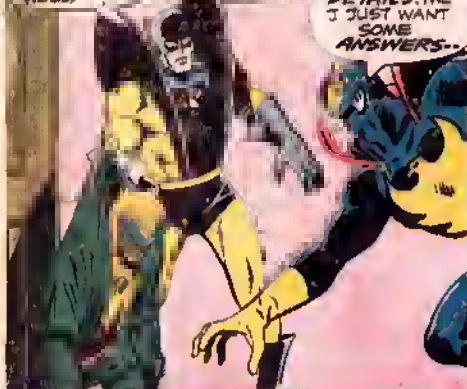
WELL, WHAT DO YOU KNOW--
THE GANG'S ALL HERE. IT'S
GOOD TO SEE YOU PEOPLE
AGAIN. *

W. WE ALSO ARE
PLEASED, BUT--!

NICE BABY!
BABY GIVE
BIG SMILE
FOR HULK
AND
BUG-MAN!

*THEY MET LAST IN
GIANT-SIZE DEFENDERS
#4--LEN.

I FOUND THIS ON A ROOF
ACROSS THE STREET. ANY IDEA
WHY THE SONS OF THE SERPEN
WOULD...?



DOC CAN
GIVE YOU ALL
THE GORY
DETAILS. ME-
I JUST WANT
SOME
ANSWERS..

--AND A GOOD LOOK AT WHAT KIND OF SCUM
WOULD BE PROUD TO WEAR THIS LOUSY
OUTFIT!



TALK!! WHO
RUNS YOUR
LITTLE PLAY-
GROUP? WHO
PAYS FOR THE
COSTUMES AND
GUNS? HOW
MANY OF YOU
ARE THERE?
AND WHAT DO
YOU REALLY
WANT??

ANSWER
ME!!

W-WE'RE AN ARMY--A GREAT WHITE ARMY--WITH BATTALIONS COAST-TO-COAST--IN EVERY MAJOR CITY! THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF US! THOUSANDS!! AND NO-BODY CAN STOP OUR MARCH! NOT YOU--NOT THE AVEN- GERS--NOT THE POLICE-- NOT ANYBODY! YOU'LL SEE AT MIDNIGHT--ON TELEVISION --WHEN THE WHOLE NATION SEES--!



YOU'LL SEE-- OUR LEADER WILL SPEAK!

I THINK WE GOT A DEFECTIVE MODEL, DOC. HE'S RAVING... OUT OF HIS MIND.



PERHAPS, OR HE MAY BE SPEAKING A TRUTH WE CAN NOT YET COMPREHEND. I'VE LEARNED... NOT TO JUDGE HASTILY.

THE FLAMES OF THE FALTIME SHALL HOLD HIM MOTION- LESS...

... WHILE WE INVESTIGATE, THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT IS BUT MINUTES AWAY. AND I HAVE A TELEVISION IN ANOTHER PARLOR. IT SHOULD BE SIMPLE ENOUGH TO --



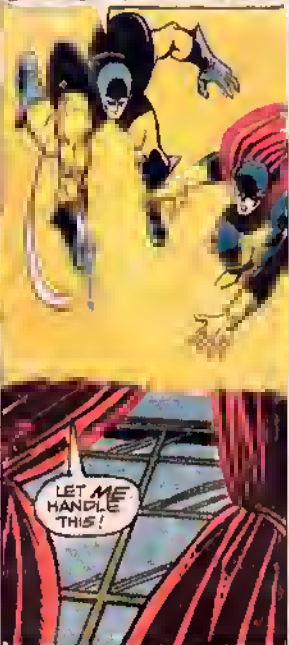
DOC, WAIT! I JUST HAD THE CREEPEST SENSATION... AS IF WE'RE BEING --

-- WATCHED. NIGHTRHAWK CRIES, AND WHIRLING ABOUT, FACING THE WINDOW, HE SEES TO HIS ALARM:



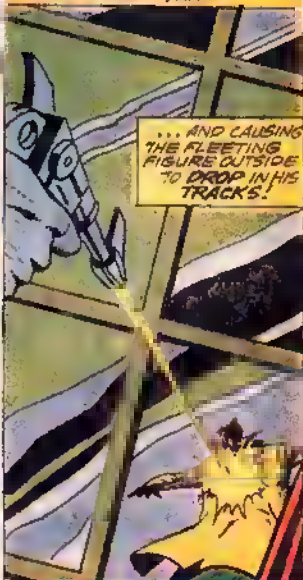
IT'S TRUE!! SOMEBODY'S OUT THERE!!

HOLD IT! KYLE--NO NEED TO GO SMASHING THRU THE GLASS!



LET ME HANDLE THIS!

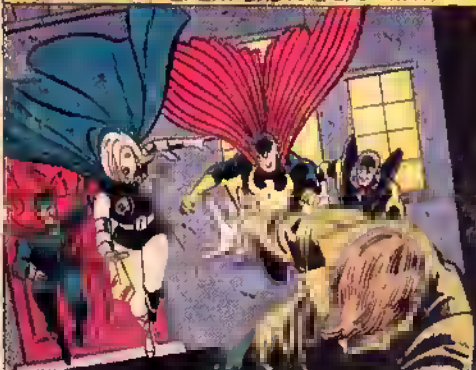
A NARROW, SHARPLY FOCUSED BEAM OF LIGHT ISSUED FORTH FROM YELLOWJACKET'S CELL- LULAR-DISRUPTOR GUN... PASSING HARMLESSLY THRU THE WINDOW PANE...



... AND CAUSING THE FLEETING FIGURE OUTSIDE TO DROP IN HIS TRACKS.

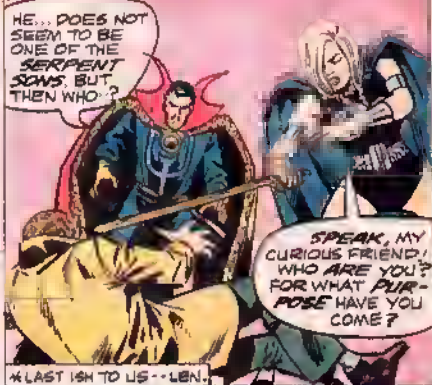
YOU ARE OFFICIALLY INVITED TO THE WEDDING OF THE VISION AND THE SCARLET WITCH. THE RECEPTION WILL BE HELD IN GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #4.

AND WITH GOOD REASON: EVERY CELL IN HIS BODY HAS MOMENTARILY BEEN STOPPED FROM FUNCTIONING. AND IN THE SECONDS IT REQUIRES FOR THE NUMBNESS TO PASS FROM HIS PRONE FORM... THE DEFENDERS ARE UPON HIM.



"IT'S THE PEEPING TOM I SPOTTED AT YOUR WINDOW EARLIER TONIGHT," NIGHTHAWK SAYS.

HE... DOES NOT SEEM TO BE ONE OF THE SERPENT SONS. BUT THEN WHO?



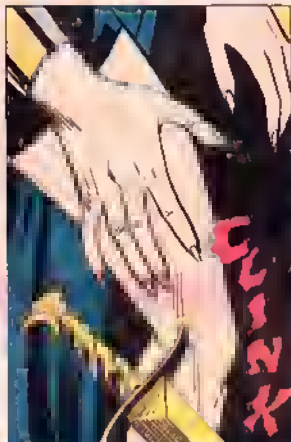
SPEAK, MY CURIOUS FRIEND! WHO ARE YOU? FOR WHAT PURPOSE HAVE YOU COME?

*LAST ISH TO US--LEN.

Y-YOU MEAN... YOU DON'T KNOW ME? YOU'VE GOT TO KNOW ME! YOU LOVE ME! I-I'M JACK NORRIS!



I'M YOUR HUSBAND--BARBARA!



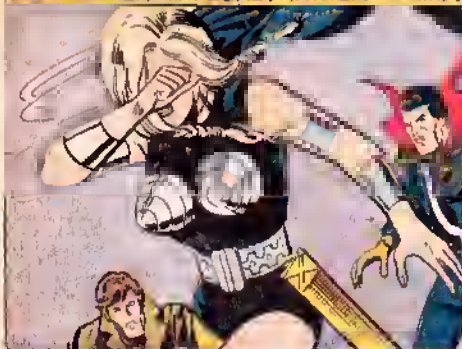
FOR LONG MOMENTS, SHE STARES AT THE FACE OF THE HANDSOME YOUNG MAN, BUT IT REMAINS... THE FACE OF A STRANGER TO HER.



FOR THOUGH YAL INHABITS THE BODY OF BARBARA DENTON NORRIS...

...THE BODY OF THIS MAN'S WIFE...

... SHE POSSESSES NONE OF BARBARA'S MEMORIES! INEXPLICABLY HORRIFIED AND REVOLTED BY JACK NORRIS' PRESENCE, THE SWORDSMAN AVERTS HER EYES AND PARTS BACK INTO THE HOUSE, LEAVING HER COMPATRIOTS... AND HER CONJUGAL PARTNER... BEHIND.



AM I GETTING SLOW IN MY OLD AGE...?



...OR DOES THIS BUSINESS REALLY NOT MAKE ANY SENSE??

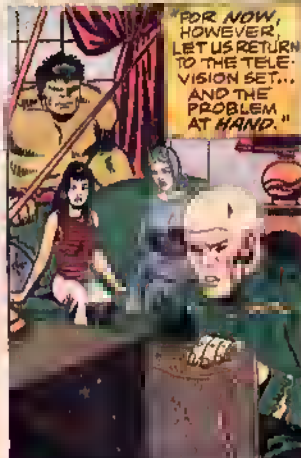
IT DOES... BUT NOT HAVING SHARED OUR EXPERIENCE IN COBBLER'S ROOST, VERMONT, YOU COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO UNDERSTAND.

THE TALE IS A LONG --AND PAINFUL-- ONE, HENRY PYM, BUT I SHALL RE-TELL IT TO YOU IN SHORT.



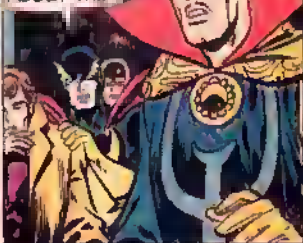
A DEFENDERS #20 (21) - L.W.

FOR NOW, HOWEVER, LET US RETURN TO THE TELEVISION SET... AND THE PROBLEM AT HAND."



THE CRISIS IN OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES MUST BE SET ASIDE UNTIL WE HAVE DEALT WITH OUR COMMON AND COMMUNAL THREAT.

I'M GLAD YOU CAN BE SO CALM ABOUT THIS



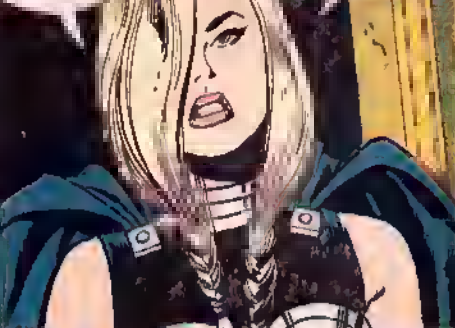
STEPHEN STRANGE DOES NOT REPLY, BUT MERELY CASTS A GLANCE AT HIS HANDSERVANT, THE FAITHFUL MOON, WHO COMPREHENDS FULLY AND AT ONCE.



AND THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO FOR HER. I FEAR--

UPSTAIRS, MASTER, AND YES, SHE APPEARED MOST DISTRAUGHT.

THERE'S NO NEED TO WHISPER STEPHEN... AND NO NEED FOR CONCERN.

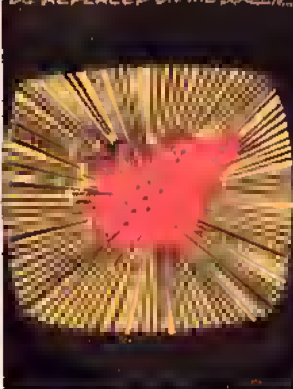


I HAVE REGAINED MY COMPOSURE... AND I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN MY RESPONSIBILITY.

THE HIGH UNBEARABLE TENSION IN THE ROOM DOES NOT DISSIPATE... BUT ALL EYES TURN TO THE CYCLOPEAN TUBE...



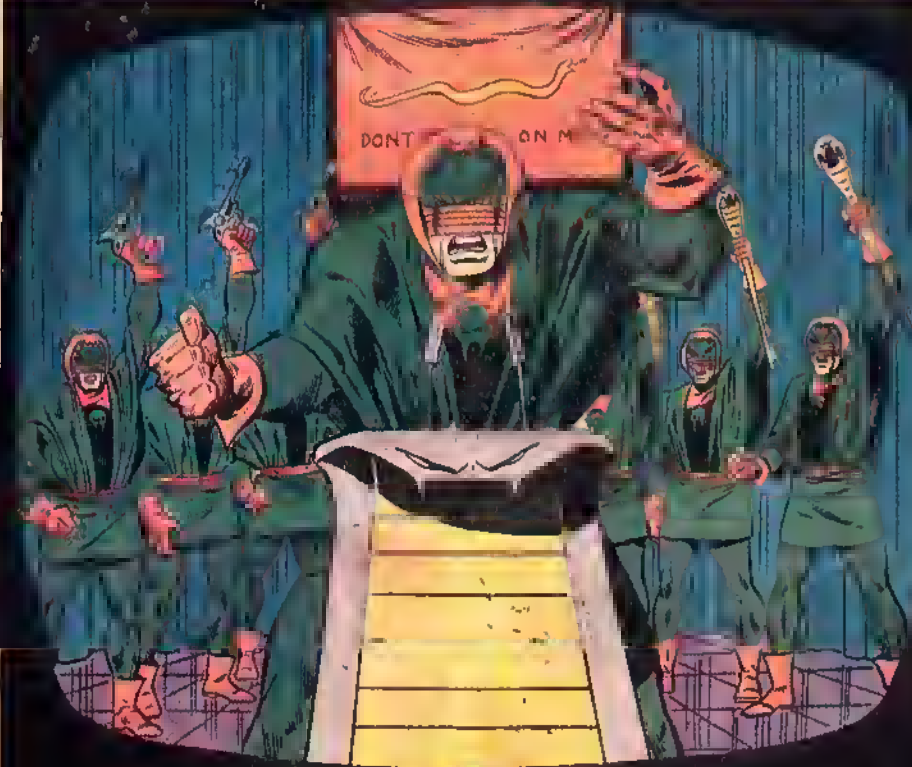
...AS TONIGHT'S GUEST HOST AND HIS INTERVIEWEE VANISH PRECISELY AT MIDNIGHT TO BE REPLACED ON THE SCREEN...



...BY THE PIERCING EYES AND Gaping MAW OF A COBRA! A CALM, EVENLY-MODULATED, DISGUISED VOICE ANNOUNCES: "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE SERPENT SUPREME OF THE UNITED STATES."



AND THE PICTURE CHANGES AGAIN....!



"My fellow Americans," the Serpent Supreme begins, "I come before you at a time when our nation stands at the crossroads of its destiny."

The effect is disconcerting. His voice—calm, assured, reasonable in tone—betrays his tongue's gab. For a moment, Nighthawk seems to sense a friendly familiarity about it, and then realizes, it must be the words, not the voice. He's heard them before from senators, congressmen, presidents, and they are as convincingly vacuous as ever.

The Serpent Supreme continues: "Our United States are plagued tonight by enemies which cannot be seen, cannot be touched, but which touch our lives in very visible ways."

"Inflation. Unemployment. Recession. The average American is shocked by the high cost of food and gasoline. He lives in fear of losing his job. He is afraid to save his money and afraid to spend it."

"And he is asked to sit back while the government lavishes billions of dollars annually on those who are too lazy to work, multitudes who think this nation owes them a living, persons who by their very presence in this nation, threaten the well being of the majority—the *white* majority."

"Who are these parasites who would steal the bread and butter from the mouths of white children...who would take your job away from you? You know them. They're the neighbors you prayed you'd never have! They're black, red, brown, or yellow of skin. They worship at something called a 'synagogue' instead of an American church. They speak behind your back in a foreign tongue."

"They are the so-called 'minorities' who rule our nation like tyrants and dictators, because our congress and our courts and the media haven't the courage to refuse them a favor."

"We intend to drive these leeches into the seas and rivers, or drown them in their own blood, if need be. And we call upon every good American, every member of the oppressed white race, to join us! Tonight heralds the coming of the Sons of The Serpent, no longer the naive tool of ambitious politicians or media magnates, but a nationwide army of common men, white men like yourselves, who stand pledged to wipe out a menace that grows like a cancer in the heart of this great land!"

"As the first serpent drove Adam and Eve from Eden, so that we drive from this land the unfit, the foreign-born, the inferior!"

"We begin even now in New York. We ask you to stand beside us when our crusade reaches your town."

"Thank you, and good morning."

The image fades...and the Delendus and then guests gaze speechless and horrified on the now-black screen.

"He didn't miss a trick," Yellowjacket mutters. "The only scare word he left out was 'communism.'"

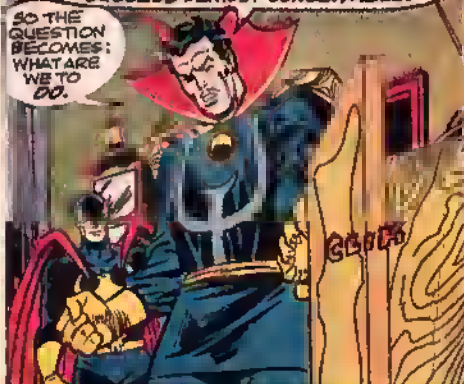
"He didn't need that one," Nighthawk grumbles. "We just signed a treaty with them."

"I was unaware such irrational hatreds existed among differing body-types, Stephen. Will anyone believe his rantings?" queries Val.

And Doctor Strange grimly nods.

THEY FULLY INTEND TO TEAR THE NATION ASUNDER AND TIMES ARE PERILOUS ENOUGH... FRUSTRATIONS, DEEP ENOUGH... AS TO MAKE THEIR SUCCESS ALMOST CONCEIVABLE.

SO THE QUESTION BECOMES: WHAT ARE WE TO DO.



GLAD

DUMB MAGICIAN DOESN'T KNOW! EVEN HULK KNOWS -- SNAKE-MEN MUST BE SMASHED!!

OBVIOUSLY, GREENSKIN... BUT THERE'S THE SMALL MATTER OF FINDING THEM FIRST, FLUSHING THEIR LEADERS OUT INTO THE OPEN AND BEATING THEM DECISIVELY.



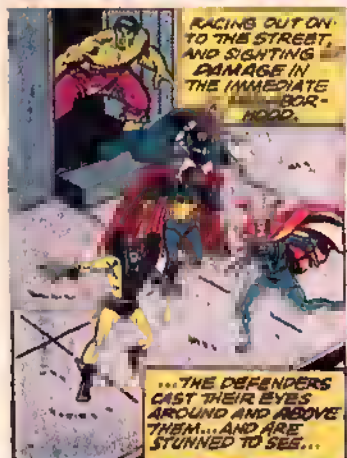
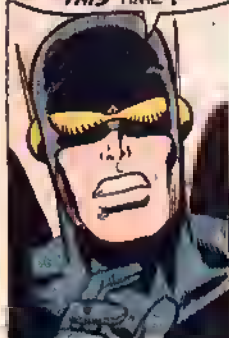
MONTAGUE HALE AND DAN DUNN, THE TV. PERSONALITIES, LED THE SERPENTS WHEN THE AVENGERS TACKLED THEM LAST. WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW IS, WHO'D BENEFIT FROM SUCH A DISRUPTION THIS TIME?

HOLLIMAN! LORD, WHY DIDN'T IT OCCUR TO ME SOONER? HE TOLD ME AT THE PARTY--HE PLANS TO BUILD A LUXURY HIGH-RISE ON THE SITE OF THE BURNED TENEMENT!

IT HAS TO BE-- HEY! THE WHOLE HOUSE IS SHAKING!

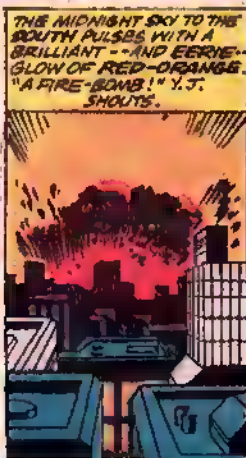
OUTSIDE-- SOME KIND OF HUGE EXPLOSION!

RRRRMMMBL



RACING OUT ON TO THE STREET, AND SIGHTING DAMAGE IN THE IMMEDIATE BOB-HOOD.

...THE DEFENDERS CAST THEIR EYES AROUND AND ABOVE THEM... AND ARE STUNNED TO SEE...

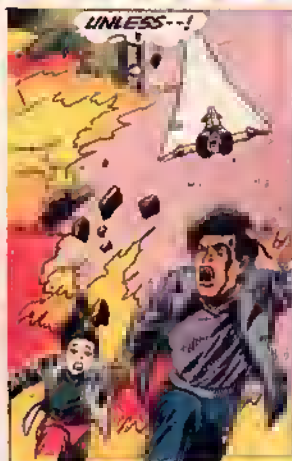
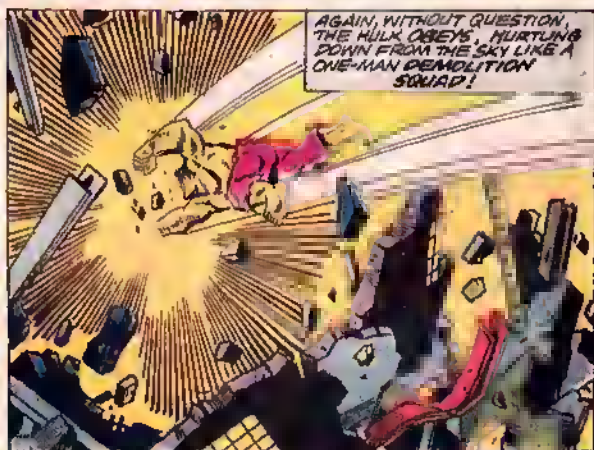
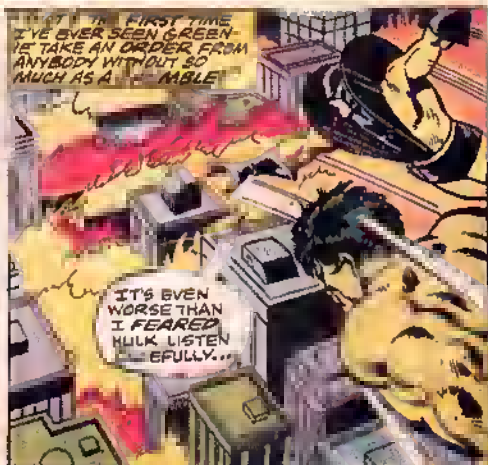
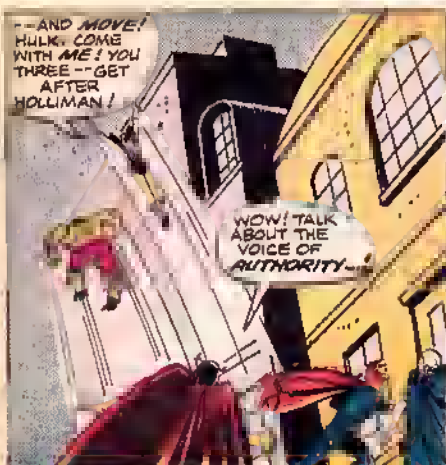


THE MIDNIGHT SKY TO THE SOUTH PULSES WITH A BRILLIANT--AND EERIE--GLOW OF RED-ORANGE. "A FIRE-BOMB!" Y.J. SHOUTS.



IF IT WAS DROPPED BY PLANE-- HALF OF LOWER MANHATTAN COULD BE IN FLAMES!

LOOKS LIKE WE SHELVE THE QUESTIONS FOR NOW--



WHILE, BACK IN THE VILLAGE...

Y-YOU'RE GOING OFF WITH THEM... LEAVING ME BEHIND? WHY?

I AM NO LONGER THE WOMAN YOU WED, MR. NORRIS.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP? YOU DON'T REALLY BELIEVE YOU'RE SOME SORT OF AMAZON?

WHATEVER VOWS WE TOOK MUST BIND US NO MORE. MY PLACE NOW CAN ONLY BE... ALONGSIDE THE DEFENDERS.

SILENTLY, NORRIS WATCHES HIS WIFE AND HER WINGED STEED TAKE TO THE SKY...

...AND CONCLUDES THAT EITHER HE OR SHE IS UTTERLY INSANE... AND THAT IT MATTERS NOT A WHIT! HE LOVES HER.

-- BUT FIRE WON'T STOP!

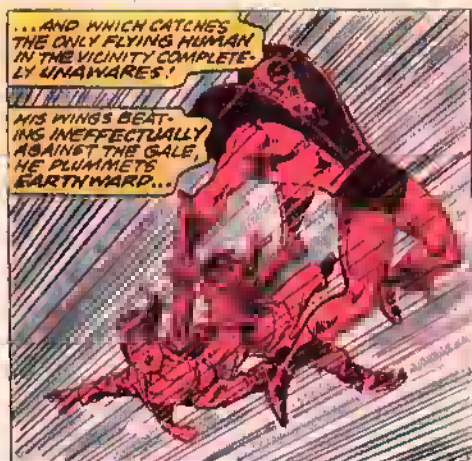
BUG-MAN'S WAY IS TOO SLOW! HULK CAN PUT FIRE OUT FASTER-- BETTER-- HULK'S OWN WAY!

BUILDINGS ARE DOWN-- HULK DID WHAT BUG-MAN TOLD HIM--

SO HULK WILL DO IT!

A SINGLE CLAP OF THE MIGHTIEST MORTAL HANDS ON EARTH-- THAT'S ALL IT TAKES TO SET UP A WIND BLAST OF NEAR-HURRICANE FORCE THAT SENDS STRAY BRICKS AND CHARRED WOOD FLYING MADLY THRU THE STREETS... THAT SNUFFS OUT THE RAGING HOLOCAUST...

WHOOSH



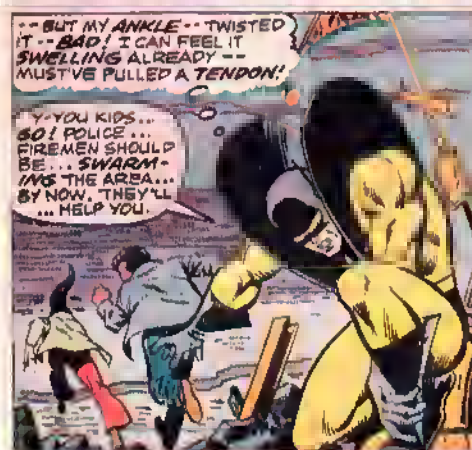
...AND WHICH CATCHES THE ONLY FLYING HUMAN IN THE VICINITY COMPLETELY UNAWARES!

HIS WINGS BEATING INEFFECTUALLY AGAINST THE GALE, HE PLUMMETS EARTHWARD...



...MANAGING TO EXECUTE A PAINFUL ONE-POINT LANDING.

MADE IT DOWN SAFELY...



-- BUT MY ANKLE... TWISTED IT -- BAD! I CAN FEEL IT SWELLING ALREADY -- MUST'VE PULLED A TENDON!

Y-YOU KIDS... SO! POLICE... FIREMEN SHOULD BE... SWARMING THE AREA... BY NOW. THEY'LL... HELP YOU.



ALAS, THE DULY CONSTITUTED AUTHORITIES ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES SWARMING THE BOULDERING RUINS.

LOOK, BROTHERS... ONE OF THE WHITE RAITORS!

OH NO, THE SONS OF THE SERPENT! AND I CAN'T EVEN STAND UP!



ONLY HOPE... IS TO ACTIVATE MY CYBERNETIC CIRCUITRY... SHRINK TO INSECT-SIZE... ESCAPE... BUT THE PAIN WON'T LET ME CONCENTRATE...! THEY'VE GOT ME! NOTHING...



...I CAN DO...!

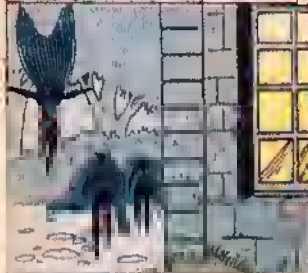
KRAK



HE'S OUT COLD SHOULD WE FINISH THE JOB?

UH-UH ORDERS ARE BRING 'IM BACK FOR INTERROGATION.

THE LONG ISLAND ESTATE OF HAROLD HOLLIMAN: A CHILLINGLY QUIET CONTRAST TO THE PANDEMONIUM THAT REIGNS IN THE CITY.



WHICH IS NOT TO SAY TEMPER ARE ANY CALMER HERE.

SAVE FOR TWO SERVANTS--BOTH ONE FOR THE NIGHT--HAROLD HOLLIMAN DWELLS ALONE IN THIS SUBURBAN PALACE OF WHITE GRANITE.



EIGHTEEN ROOMS, ALL TO HIMSELF.

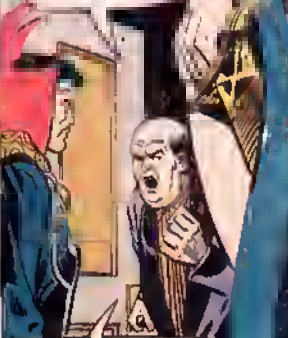
HE RARELY HAS VISITORS, NEVER ENTERTAINS... AND WHEN PEOPLE DROP BY UNINVITED, DISTURBING HIS SLEEP, INVADING HIS PRIVACY, HE BECOMES ENRAGED. HE DRIVES THEM AWAY AND SUITORS CURSE DOWN HIS EMPTY CORRIDORS.

HEAD NODDING WILDLY, PER-SPARATION RACING IN RIVULETS DOWN THE LOOSE, BOUNCING FLESH OF HIS CHEEKS AND JOWLS, HOLLIMAN ACCEDS.



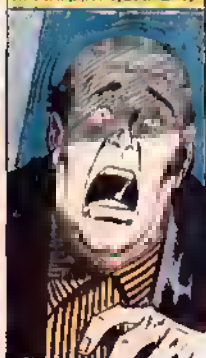
"THE TRUTH," NIGHTHAWK SHOUTS. "THAT TEMPER-MENT BURNING SOLVED A LOT OF PROBLEMS FOR YOU, DIDN'T IT? SAVED YOU SOME MONEY!"

OF ALL THE-- NO I WON'T ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS WHY SHOULD I?

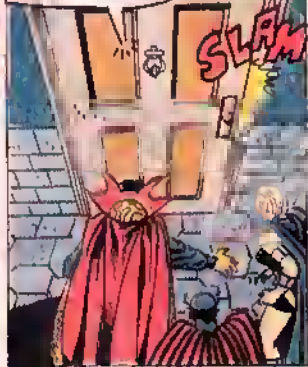


I'VE DONE NOTHING WRONG--AND YOU'RE NOT THE POLICE!

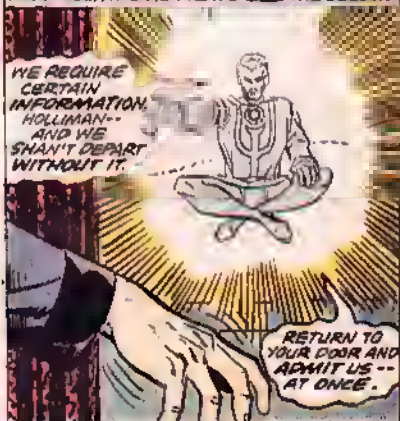
HE STALKS UPSTAIRS BACK TO HIS BEDROOM, THROWS OPEN THE DOOR... AND FREEZES IN ARRANT HORROR!



I CAN ARRANGE FOR YOU TO MEET THEM, THOUGH-- IF YOU DON'T GET OFF MY PROPERTY!



FOR FLOATING ABOVE HIS BED, HE SEES...



WE REQUIRE CERTAIN INFORMATION, HOLLIMAN-- AND WE SHAN'T DEPART WITHOUT IT.

RETURN TO YOUR DOOR AND ADMIT US-- AT ONCE.

NO NEED TO FIX THE BOLLER OR PAINT THE PLACE... IF YOU KNEW IT'D BE DESTROYED!

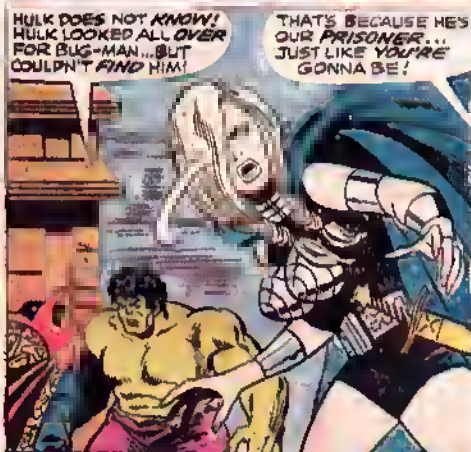


ALL RIGHT! I ADMIT IT--I'M GLAD IT HAPPENED! BUT I SWEAR-- I DIDN'T KNOW-- I'VE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE SONS OF THE SERPENT!

YOU'RE LYING! I WANT THE--

NIGHTHAWK-- ENOUGH! I'M NOT CERTAIN WHY... BUT I BELIEVE WHAT HE SAYS.





Snake-men are Hulk's enemies!
Hulk hates snake-men! Hulk will
crush them-- and puny light-
guns will not stop Hulk!

Nothing
can stop
Hulk!!

He's still on his
feet-- but he's
weakening!
The robot staves
--like them--
now!

Like magic in some
pharaoh's court,
the serpent spawn
strike their staves
hard against the
asphalt...

... and they are transformed into writh-
ing coils of
roboticized
steel!

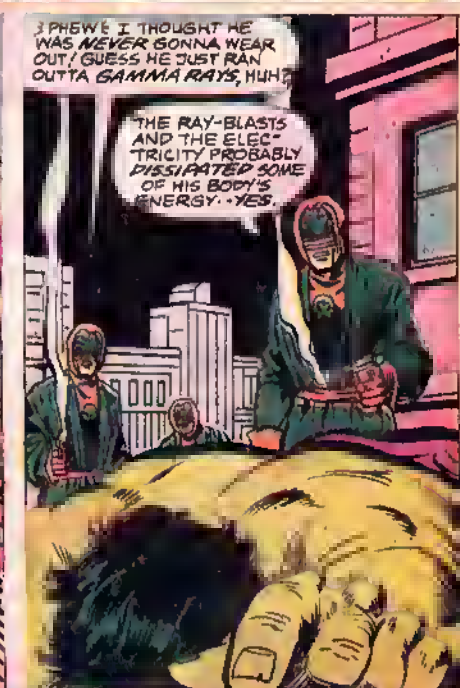
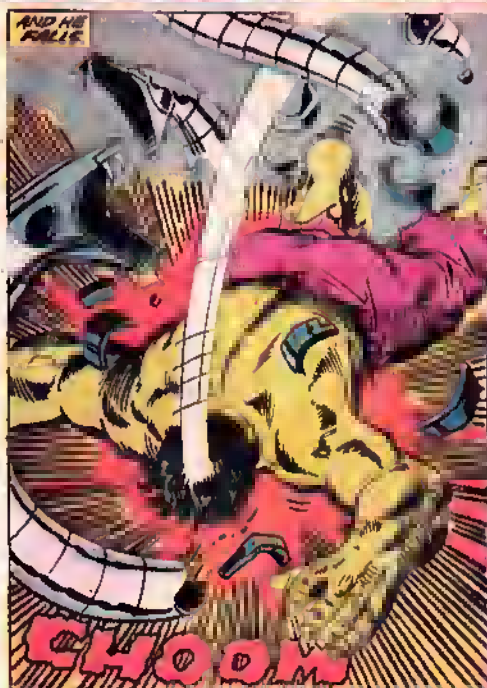
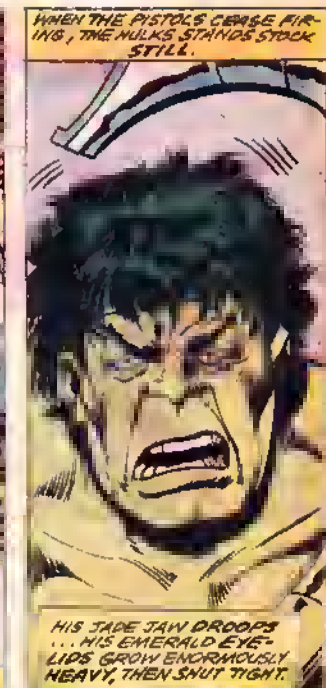
Coils which
flash and hiss
with pulsing,
thrashing,
ready...

-- Electricity!!

They twine
themselves
about the
Jape Giant
and the
pain they
inflict is
quite
literally
staggering.

But even this is
insufficient to
halt a creature...

... whose gamma
ray-altered
body chemistry
translates his
anger into
raw power!





BUT WE CANNOT AFFORD TO WASTE PRECIOUS SECONDS
BLOATING OVER THIS MINOR VICTORY.

WE'LL DELIVER THE
THREE WHITE TRAITORS
TO OUR HEADQUARTERS
-- THEN RESUME OUR
PART OF THE MISSION.

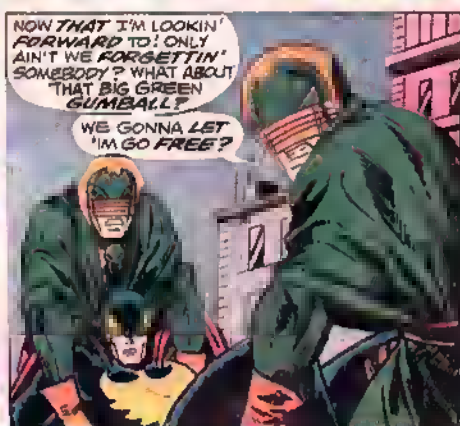
HURRY! WE
CAN'T RISK
THE CHANCE
THEY'LL
RECOVER.



WHY D'YA FIGURE THE
SERPENT SUPREME WANTS
THESE CLOWNS ALIVE?

HE HASN'T
CONFIDED IN
ME -- BUT I'D
VENTURE HE
INTENDS TO
MAKE
EXAMPLES
OF THEM...

... MOST LIKELY
IN A PUBLIC
EXECUTION.



NOW THAT I'M LOOKIN'
FORWARD TO! ONLY
AIN'T WE FORGETTIN'
SOMEBODY? WHAT ABOUT
THAT BIG GREEN
GUMBALL?

WE GONNA LET
'IM GO FREE?



ARE YOU KIDDING?
HOW COULD WE HOLD
ONTO HIM ONCE WE
CAME TO?



FOR THAT
MATTER,
HOW COULD
WE EVEN
LIFT
HIM?!



BESIDES -- HE'S NO
DANGER TO US NOW.
HE'S SO STUPID, HE
PROBABLY WON'T
EVEN REMEMBER
WHAT HAPPENED
TO 'IM!

NEXT
NOT ONE -- NOT TWO -- BUT THREE
FABULOUS GUEST-STARS, AS A NEW
TEAM OF DEFENDERS JOINS FORCES
TO SAVE A NATION ON THE BRINK OF CHAOS!
DAREDEVIL! POWER MAN! SON OF
SATAN! SIDE-BY-SIDE WHEN...

THE SERPENT SHEDS
IT'S SKIN!